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AUTHOR Bartelo, Dennise M.
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ABSTRACT

Suggesting that perhaps teachers have been overlooking the role of drawing in children's communication development by concentrating on the verbal aspects of language, this paper discusses aspects of verbal and graphic language and looks at the interrelationships between these elements in the process of communication. Selected picture stories of a set of first grade twins with limited English proficiency provide the context for the exploration of children's meaning construction. The paper examines children's picture stories by (1) documenting graphic language as it occurs in the process of communication, (2) tracing the interrelationships of drawing/reading, talking/listening, and writing/reading as children interact with print in a tutoring session, and (3) analyzing children's meaning construction from an "in process" rather than a "product" perspective. The children's picture stories and transcripts of the tutoring sessions are included. (HTH)

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Dennise M. Bartelo

Instructor in Education

Plymouth State College

Rounds Hall

Plymouth, NH 03264

603- 536- 1550, ext. 539

Getting the Picture of Language Learning

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Getting the Picture of Language Learning

Children's picture stories carry information about meaning construction. These picture stories are descriptive conceptualizations of the world as viewed through the eyes of a child. Children's drawing has been described as a pictorial language which children use for play to devise their own graphic language as a means of representing their thoughts (Vygotsky, 1978; Horovitz, Lewis, & Luca, 1973). Language, whether verbal or graphic, is a conceptual and communicative system. Language is a code; a means of representing ideas about the world through a conventional system of signals (which include sounds, words, sentences); visual signs and movements (drawings, gestures, facial expressions); and symbols (aspects of experience) for use in a particular context (Bloom & Lahey, 1978).

Meaning construction for young children comes about through the integration of listening, speaking, reading, drawing, and writing in the processing of information. The role of children's drawings in developing written expression has been the topic of much research and interest in our awareness that "Every child has a story to tell" (Graves, 1983). Perhaps, as teachers, we have been missing part of this story by concentrating on the verbal aspects of

language rather than seeing language from a holistic perspective. What do children's picture stories tell us about their use of listening, speaking, reading, drawing, and writing in the communication process? How do these picture stories reflect the interconnections between these processes? What implications does this information have for teachers in guiding children's literacy development?

In this discussion, we will review aspects of verbal and graphic language, and look at the interrelationships between these elements in the process of communication. The picture stories of two first grade twins (with Limited English Proficiency) were studied from January through May. A selection from this study will provide the context for this exploration of children's meaning construction.

Children's Picture Stories: Language Undergoing Meaning Construction

Children's perceptions and use of pictorial representations have been the subject of many studies of children's cognitive and psychological development (Alschuler & Hattiwick, 1969; Gardner, 1980). Observations of children learning to write have shown use of visual signs and symbols (Britton, 1970; Clay, 1975; Ferreiro, 1978; Bissex, 1980; Temple, Nathan, &

Burris, 1982) in children's efforts to organize and make sense of print, and communicate personally meaningful messages.

The connection of children's picture writing and the writing of letters and words has led to the examination of the relationships between writing and other communication processes. Graves (1983) and Milliker (1982) found that as children progressed in their writing development, they used sentence narratives which often emphasized particular elements in their drawings. Investigations of children's drawing, talking, and writing behaviors (Dyson, 1983; Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1982) have demonstrated that children make graphics which they can talk about and which represent meaningful aspects of their environment.

Clay (1979) believed that the earliest reading behaviors could best be observed in relation to children's drawings. Ferreiro's (1982) examinations of children's conceptions of the relationship between print and picture found that children move back and forth between picture and print to express their messages. This use of drawing as a visual record for communication of both referential and expressive meaning has also been documented by Ives, Silverman, Kelly, and Gardner (1981). The reciprocal role of

reading and writing in meaning construction is continuing to be explored by Atwell (1983), Boutwell (1983), Hansen & Graves (1983) and Newkirk (1982).

Writing has been described even more broadly by Hennings & Grant (1981). They stated that writing is interrelated with listening, speaking, dramatizing, non-verbal activities, drawing, reading, and thinking. Moxley (1982) stated that the most important features of writing are those that it shares with other processes of communication. The studies mentioned above each have looked at writing in terms of its relationship with a particular communication process. However, children move fluidly between the language arts (Emig, 1977; Busching & Lundsteen, 1983) and so our studies need to interlace all the communication processes to understand how young children develop language and literacy skills.

Many current studies state that a strong interrelationship exists among the language skills of listening, speaking, writing, drawing, and reading (Parker, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Wilson, 1981). There seems, however, to be a lack of case studies of children actually constructing these relationships in the process of interacting with print in school settings. Most analyses of the interrelationships among listening, speaking, writing, drawing, and

reading have been drawn from an "after the fact" perspective, focusing on a few of these language processes, rather than from a viewpoint of seeing these interrelationships happening all at once. Children's drawings have usually been mentioned only as an incidental feature of children's writing with little systematic documentation of the role of graphic language in the process of communication.

The purpose of this article is to examine children's picture stories by:

1. documenting graphic language as it occurs in the process of communication
2. tracing the interrelationships of drawing/reading, talking/listening, and writing/reading as children interact with print in a tutoring session
3. analyzing from an "in process" versus a product perspective children's meaning construction

Susie's Picture Story Episode

"I want to read dis today," Susie said as she entered my ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) resource room. Susie attended my class three times per week for thirty minute individual tutoring sessions. She handed me a Time magazine with Michael

Jackson on the cover, and we proceeded to find the story about him as Susie discussed her favorite singer. Susie liked to read, and the tutoring sessions focused on reading and discussing a book, story retelling, writing, and follow-up language activities. Susie looked at the pictures of Michael Jackson in the article, and attempted to read with me the captions beneath them. As I read parts of the article to her, she constantly added her own thoughts about the story, such as "Oh my gosh- burned hair!" After the reading, I gave Susie her writing folder. The following is the picture story made by Susie, and a condensed transcript of her picture story episode which was recorded on cassette tape.

Susie's Picture Story "Michael Jackson" Transcript

1. Teacher asks, "What are you going to write about today?" Susie smiles and says, "Michael Jackson"/
2. Susie begins to draw a picture of herself/
3. She asks me if I like Michael Jackson and if I know his song, "Thriller." I tell her that I like Michael Jackson, too and that I have that record/
4. Susie talks about the videos on TV, stops to show me how she can dance like Michael Jackson/
5. Susie looks at herself in her drawing and adds a curl/
6. Susie discusses how she likes Michael Jackson's curly hair/

Figure 1 - Susie's Michael Jackson

Picture Story

"Susie - I Love Michael Jackson".

Wednesday
March 7

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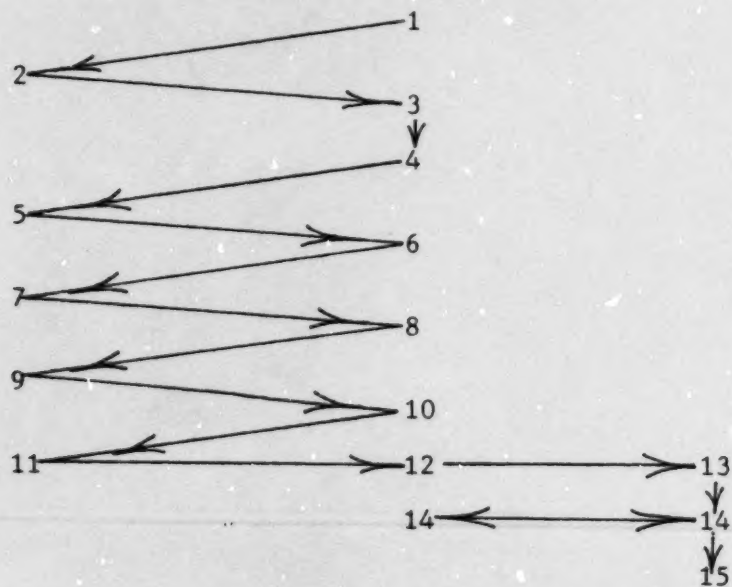


7. She begins to draw Michael Jackson/
8. Susie talks about how she has written him a letter,
and how she will visit Michael Jackson in
California when she gets older/
9. Susie looks at the picture she has drawn of him,
adds dark lines/
10. She tells me it is make-up for his monster costume
face/
11. Susie looks at her drawing, and laughs/
12. She says she looks funny/
13. Susie writes her name on her face/
14. Susie then vocalizes as she writes "Susie loves
Michael Jackson"/
15. She then rereads her picture story and closes her
folder/

A chart of this picture story transcript shows the range of modalities Susie utilized in her picture story construction. Her movement across the channels of drawing/reading a picture, talking/listening, reading/writing displays how these channels were used in her meaning construction. The channels of communication are grouped in the first chart to display them in their complementary relationships. The numbers used on the chart correspond to the sequence of their use as detailed in the transcript above. For example, Susie states in number one that she is going

Susie's Michael Jackson Picture Story Modality Chart

Drawing/Reading Picture Talking/Listening Writing/Reading



to write about Michael Jackson, and in number two, proceeds to draw a picture of herself. In number three, she stops to discuss Michael Jackson with me.

From the chart, we can see that Susie's picture story construction relied heavily on the drawing/reading and talking/listening modalities. The topic of the story read was also reflected in her drawing theme and the focus of her talking and writing. Many of the children in Susie's first grade had writing folders that contained pictures of Michael Jackson, and so the social context of her story was probably influenced by peers.

In another tutoring session, the folktale, Anansi, was read to Susie. We discussed the tale and Susie retold the tale using the pictures of the book as a guide and flannel board characters. I then handed Susie her writing folder, and a condensed transcript of the picture story episode is given below.

Susie's Spider Picture Story Transcript

1. Susie says, "I don't like spiders." She thinks a minute, then says, "I know-Spiderman"/
2. Susie begins to write/
3. She stops to sound the word "spider"/
4. Susie rereads her first sentence/
5. She continues to write, pauses after the word me/

Figure 2 - Susie's Spiderman Picture Story- "I see a spider.
You know me. I know who you are. I am Spiderman."

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" Fraby 122

I see a Sidr

you now Me I now e

u 20

I am SPIDERMAN



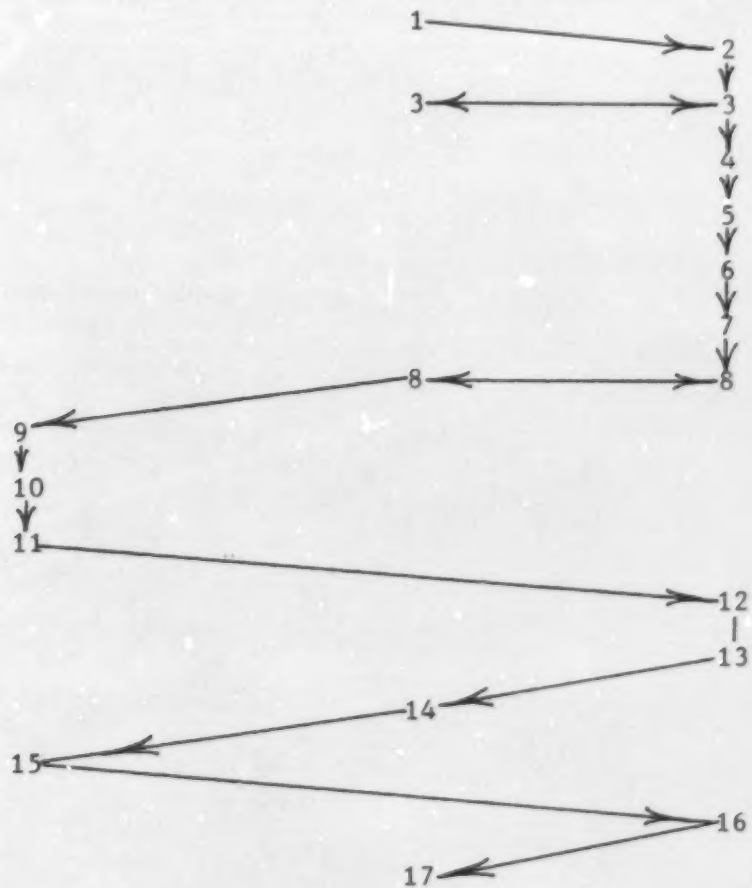
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6. Susie rereads from the beginning of her text/
7. She writes/
8. Susie vocalizes as she writes, "I know who you are"/
9. She begins to draw, tracing over the face of her picture/
10. Susie finishes drawing her picture/
11. She looks at her picture/
12. Susie rereads her sentences/
13. Susie writes "I am spiderman"/
14. Teacher asks "Do you watch Spiderman on TV? Susie says yes, and says she watches TV a lot/
15. Susie colors her picture some more, looks at it/
16. She rereads her story/
17. Susie ends her rereading with "There" and seems very pleased/

Looking at this picture story episode, we see that Susie utilized the talking/listening and writing/reading modalities for the most part in her picture story construction. The topic of the story read was elaborated to reflect a personal preference. Writing was the primary text in this episode, with the drawing being of secondary importance. In this episode and the other, talking and listening began the picture story construction process. There appeared in both episodes to be an integration between the processes;

Susie's Spiderman Picture Story Modality Chart

Drawing/Reading Picture Talking/Listening Writing/Reading



not a linear progression of listening and speaking to reading to drawing and writing, but a back and forth movement between the communication processes.

Sam's Picture Story Episodes

Sam, Susie's twin brother, was placed in the other first grade classroom (separate from his sister) because of competition difficulties resulting from differences in academic achievement. Sam also attended my ESOL resource class three times per week. After reading and discussing Curious George Learns the Alphabet, by H. A. Rey, the following picture story episode occurred.

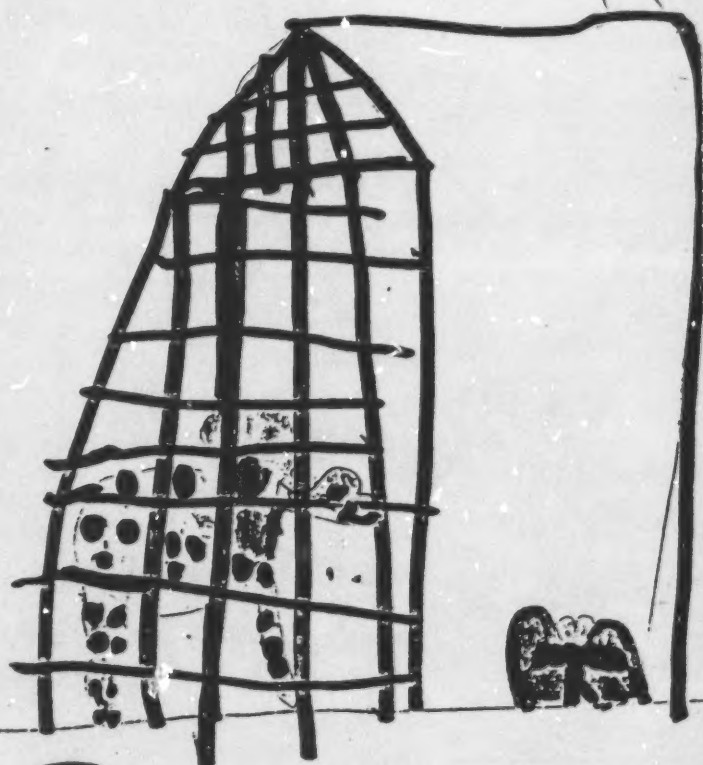
Sam's Lion Picture Story Transcript

1. Sam says, "I'm gonna write about a lion and a mouse.
I know how to draw a lion- ugh- how to draw a mouse?/"
2. Teacher and Sam look through the story to find a mouse"/
3. Sam says, "OK, I know how/"
4. Pe begins to draw the lion/
5. Sam stops drawing and says to me, " Look he's mad; he's gonna try to eat the mouse (which he hasn't drawn yet) and he's spying..." /
6. Sam draws and talks about the tree he is making and the mouse he is making/

7. I ask Sam if he has ever seen a mouse on TV,
and Sam replies, "Sure, sure. I seen Mickey Mouse
and Mighty Mouse"/
8. Sam asks me, "What traps look like?"
9. I show Sam an earlier drawing he made of Donkey
Kong. He looks at it/
10. Sam says that he drew a good picture and says that
he remembers how to draw a trap/
11. Sam colors his drawing/
12. He says that the lion is a "daddy lion," makes
flying noises for the mouse/
13. Sam begins to write his story/
14. He asks how to spell "goes" and I tell him/
15. Sam writes the word as I spell it for him/
16. Sam stops writing and refers to the story to find
a picture of a lion/
17. Sam finds a picture of a lion and points to the
word under it/
18. He writes the word, "lion"/
19. Sam reads the story he wrote/
20. He says, "There, looks good to me"/

Sam's lion picture story modality chart shows his preference for the drawing/reading and talking/listening modes. The story he wrote displayed the main idea from his drawing in a caption-like manner. Although a picture of a lion was in the story

Figure 3 - Sam's Lion Picture Story - " Super Mouse goes to save the lion."

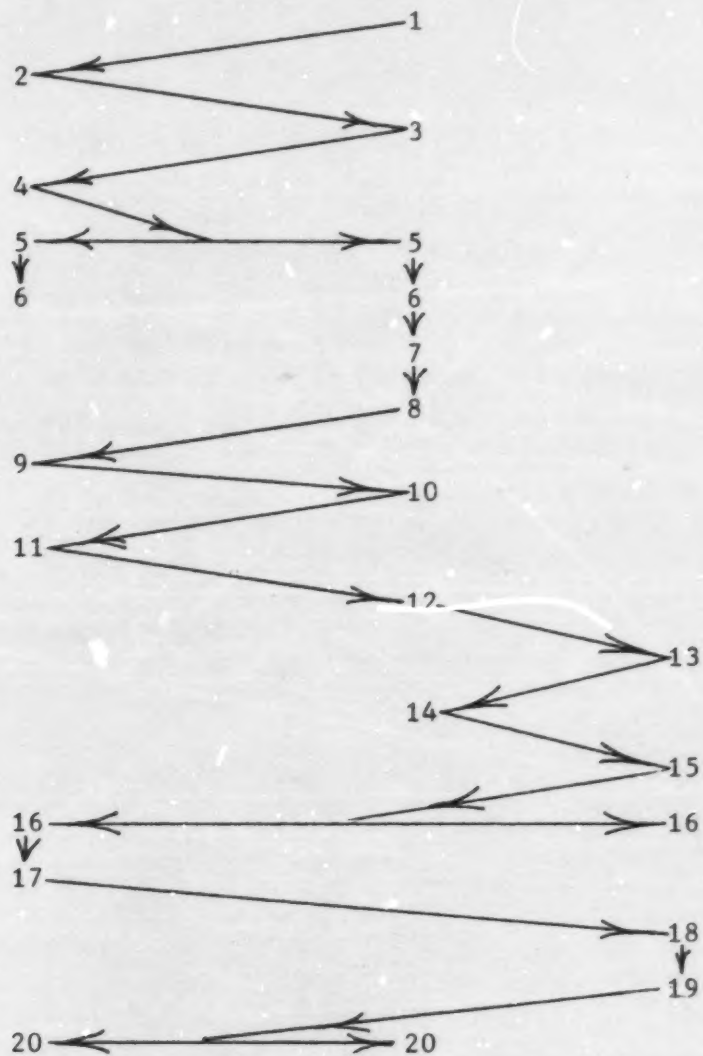


SUPER MOWS
S, goes to save
The lion

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Sam's Lion Picture Story Modality Chart

Drawing/Reading Picture Talking/Listening Writing/Reading



read, Sam definitely brought his background of experience of watching cartoons into his story. Sam was also using the story read and teacher as references in writing (spelling a word) but especially in drawing, where Sam seemed quite concerned about drawing accurate representations of his ideas.

In another tutoring session, Sam listened to Bill Martin's Read Along book and cassette, I'm Gonna Build a Supermarket. In his writing folder that day, Sam didn't know what to write, and reviewed his previous picture stories. He then began to draw a volcano, and the transcript of this picture story episode is given below.

Sam's Volcano Picture Story Transcript

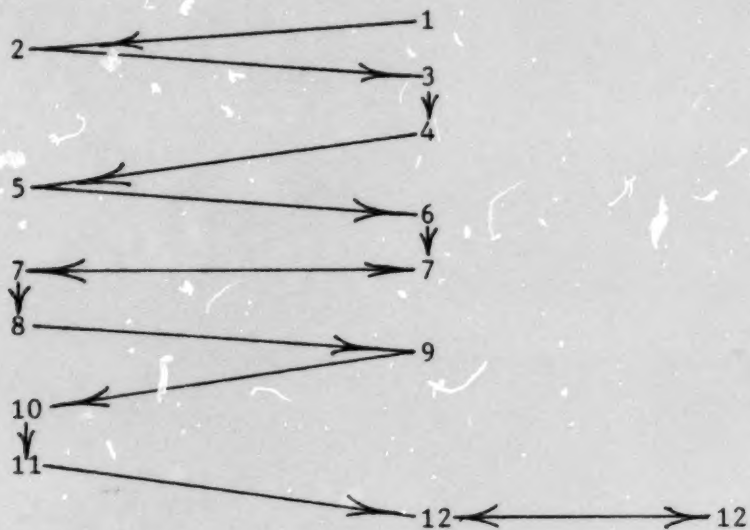
1. Sam says, "I don't know what to write- hmmm- Oh, I know, wait till you see this"/
2. Sam begins to draw/
3. He says, "See this- this is mountain, is volcano."
4. I ask Sam if he has seen volcano on TV, and he says yes. Teacher and Sam discuss volcanoes in Hawaii which were on the news/
5. Sam continues to draw/
6. Sam says he has talked to his Dad about volcanoes/
7. Sam talks as he draws, "Ka-boom- hot lava- very hot- see it, it going down mountain and people everybody get out!"/



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Sam's Volcano Picture Story Modality Chart

Drawing/Reading Picture Talking/Listening Writing/Reading



8. Sam continues to color the drawing, draws smoke and lava spilling into the sky in his picture/
9. Sam asks if I have books about volcanoes. We discuss the volcano-like drawings and dinosaur pictures that are outside his first grade classroom/
10. Sam finishes his drawing/
11. Sam looks at his drawing/
12. I ask him if he is going to "write anything else." Sam says he is not sure. Then, he asks me how to spell volcano, and writes each letter as I spell it/

From this picture story modality chart, we can see that Sam again relied on the drawing/reading and talking/listening modalities. There seemed to be an equal balance of mode-switching occurring between drawing/reading and talking/listening. The topic of his drawing was definitely influenced more by his TV viewing and father's discussion than by the story read.

Summary of Picture Story Episodes

In general, the children's picture stories served a major role in their meaning constructions. These picture stories were:

1. aids in deepening conceptualization of experiences (Sam's volcano picture story

helped him clarify his understanding of this topic which he had discussed with his dad)

2. reflections of the children's background of experiences with their environment (Susie's Michael Jackson picture stories reflected her peer group and home experiences)
3. an integral part of the children's communication process, representing listening, speaking, drawing, writing, and reading patterns of usage and preference

The interconnective patterns which the children weaved during the picture story episodes showed their interactions with print and picture and their verbal-visual thinking patterns. Susie tended to draw and write about topics in an expressive and social context. Sam's picture stories reflected broader themes, and he definitely preferred drawing to writing. Sam's attention during reading focused on the pictures; Susie's attention focused on the print. Susie's picture stories displayed her use of language for a personal function; to share her likes and understandings of herself. Sam's picture stories displayed language use for an imaginative function; to play with signals and symbols of meaning- their sounds, rhythms, and associations.

Conclusions

Language learning involves construction of meaning which children interactively build from what they know, believe or understand at their level of development, and from what they have experienced in their environment. There are multiple levels and forms of communicating a message. In the picture stories discussed, we have seen how children utilize various modes in processing language. Each child has his or her own individual pattern of language expression, and this pattern may and will vary accordingly.

Too often we conceive of literacy as a one way linear highway, rather than see it as a complex multiple modality system of interrelated processes of listening, speaking, drawing, writing, and reading which make up its meaning construction framework. Perhaps we need to take a closer look at language learning and consider:

1. How do children's understanding of concepts deepen as they use preferred modality patterns?
2. How do children differ in their preference of modalities?
3. How do children interpret and add personal meaning experiences in the language episode?

The cognitive, expressive, receptive, and social contexts through which children learn about their

world are important aspects for consideration in helping us "get the picture" of language learning. Language learning is a multi-faceted process through which children utilize all the channels of communication to extract meaning, make sense of print, and express meaning in language natural to them at their stage of development.

Teaching Implications and Suggestions for Research

As teachers, we need to start thinking and teaching language as an integrated process, rather than a conglomeration of isolated units of study. In looking at the needs of the whole child, we also need to look at all the modalities through which children process language. We need to offer opportunities for children to process meaning through a wide variety of modalities and recognize, as well as capitalize, on children's preferences in meaning construction.

Further research is needed in understanding how children's preferences and use of modalities influence particular communication processes. Continuing study of the complementary nature of the the communication processes may lead to further suggestions both for research and practice.

Our recognition of the multi-faceted nature of language learning will help us "get the total picture" of children's meaning constructions.

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